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P-TECH NORWALK NAMED A COMMISSIONER'S AWARD WINNER FOR THE 2021 CONNECTICUT FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID CHALLENGE

Norwalk, Conn. (September 24, 2021) - P-TECH Norwalk has been named a Commissioner's Award winner for the 2021 Connecticut Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Challenge. The Commissioner's Award is presented to the school that shows the highest FAFSA completion rate amongst similarly sized schools, relative to the previous year.

P-TECH was recognized today as a challenge winner at a celebratory event in West Haven. P-TECH Principal Karen Amaker joined Governor Lamont, Commissioner Russell-Tucker, Deputy Commissioner Nesmith, school administrators, counselors and higher education partners during the event for a panel drawing attention to the Challenge and the importance of FAFSA completion. Before each year of college, students are encouraged to apply for federal grants, work-study, and loans via the FAFSA form. FAFSA data determines federal aid eligibility, and many states and colleges using FAFSA data to award their own aid.

Connecticut's first early college, 9-14 high school established in 2014 by IBM, Norwalk Community College and the Norwalk Public Schools, participated in the statewide FAFSA Challenge last December when Governor Ned Lamont announced the initiative.

The goal of the challenge was to help high school seniors and their families access and complete FAFSA enrollment. P-TECH Norwalk was one of sixteen school districts in Connecticut selected to join the FAFSA Learning Cohort and compete for prizes designed to help those districts in most need overcome the obstacles to completion while providing targeted support based on national best practices.

Working with the CT State Department of Education, P-TECH Norwalk partnered with local non-profit organizations to encourage and support families to complete FAFSA applications. P-TECH collaborated with district partner Norwalk ACTS as a FAFSA Challenge co-applicant to develop an action plan and monitor weekly data throughout the challenge. Norwalk ACTS also helped secure funding from People's United Bank to cover the costs for Norwalk Author Stacia Morris to sign and distribute her book *Teen Money 101* to all graduating seniors to celebrate their accomplishment of completing the FAFSA.

P-TECH had 77.9 percent of its class of 2021 complete the FAFSA, raising the bar for completion rate for high school students across Connecticut. As a reward for this accomplishment, P-TECH was granted \$5,000 to be used toward innovative strategies for boosting FAFSA completion rates for the class of 2022.

Over the course of the challenge P-TECH's senior counselor participated in professional development courses on how best to support students through the process. Students were also incentivized with weekly Amazon gift card drawings using funds provided to FAFSA Challenge schools by the Connecticut State Department of Education.

“We were honored to participate in the FAFSA Challenge with the goal of getting the word out to students and ensuring that they understood the benefits of the FAFSA application,” said P-TECH Principal Karen Amaker. “The process can seem overwhelming, but taking the time to promote an understanding of how higher education entities use this report to determine student aid and scholarships helped us increase the amount of completed applications.”

P-TECH Norwalk will offer a virtual presentation that will provide a step-by-step demonstration on how to complete the FAFSA Tuesday, September 28, and Tuesday, October 12, at 6pm. [The link to register can be found here and will be the same for both dates.](#) Please contact College and Career Specialists Ari Meadows: meadowsa@norwalkps.org or Sherieda Reid: reidsh@norwalkps.org with any questions.

FAFSA completion is strongly associated with postsecondary enrollment and outcomes given that 90 percent of high school seniors who complete the FAFSA attend college directly from high school, compared to just 55 percent of FAFSA non-completers. Yet, thousands of Connecticut students who are eligible for college aid fail to file the FAFSA each year and in doing so, leave millions of unclaimed dollars that could support their postsecondary education. A recent analysis by the financial media company NerdWallet found that approximately 12,000 Connecticut seniors in the graduating Class of 2018 failed to complete the form and slightly less than half of those FAFSA non-completers would have been eligible for Pell Grants totaling \$17 million.

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About P-TECH Norwalk

P-TECH Norwalk’s goal is to prepare students for the ever-changing workplace by developing professional skills and STEM knowledge. P-TECH students have access to a great support system, with the help of counselors, teachers, IBM mentors, and like-minded classmates. P-TECH students, who apply through a lottery with no academic screening –simultaneously earn a high school diploma from P-TECH and a tuition-free associate degree from Norwalk Community College. They finish college without debt and with the skills to compete in well-paying technology fields or to continue their education.